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Swiss Boom and Foreign Labour

(Continued from September Issue)

The first and immediate result of the restrictions on foreign labour was "chaos at Chiasso" on the first day. At Brigue, Domodossola, Geneva, Buchs — everywhere the same story: foreigners were turned back. According to some reports, as many as 4500 Italians alone were sent back during the first few weeks. Other nationals included twenty Turks and a score of Iranians. More foreign workers already in Switzerland have asked for visas to countries like Canada. In a few weeks the number was 700 as against 2-300 at the most during previous months.

At the end of 1964, 793,351 foreign workers had had permits to stay or to reside. This was an increase of 60% since 1960. In addition, their families and 15,000 members of international organisations and administrations and their families have to be counted, bringing the total to a million. The foreign population makes up 14% as against 9½% in 1960. In Geneva it is 30% including international personnel, in the Ticino 22%, Vaud 18%, Zurich 16%. The lowest figures are for Uri with 4% and Obwalden 5%. In 1964, 36,745 entry permits were issued (1963: 242,166) and 2591 (1225) refused. 63,399 (42,162) permissions for limited stays were given, 2268 (1885) foreigners were turned away at the frontiers and 4776 (4074) were prohibited entry for good. The total for new permits issued in 1964 numbered 455,405, 10,354 more than in 1963. Italians are still at the top of the list—this also applies to the whole of Europe according to UNO—1.5 millions. Luxembourg has 50% foreigners, France 11% and Germany 5%, a grand total of four millions.

According to the last figures available (September 1964), Swiss workers in factories numbered 62.1% and foreigners 37.9%.

Other figures published were those of the transfer of money which amounted to 481.3 million francs to Italy, 89.4 to Spain and 5.9 million francs to Greece.

A circular was sent to cantonal authorities and labour offices by BIGA (Federal Office for Industry, Trade and Labour) giving detailed instruction and asking that registers be established of all firms employing foreigners.

The writer of a leader in "The Times" on 6th April "Keep Switzerland Swiss" said that Switzerland had been so traditionally regarded as the home of international organisations that it came as something of a shock to realise that the Swiss were becoming increasingly concerned about being swamped by the foreigner. As was reported in a previous issue, there is alarm about "over-foreignisation." There is a Swiss popular movement against it. The present 5% is deemed fictitious as under the new agreement with Italy (accepted by 117:26 votes in Parliament in March and which came into force on 22nd April), the Italian workers are allowed to have their families with them after eighteen

months. Thus, whilst the number of workers would be smaller, their families would reduce the actual saving in foreign manpower. Assimilation and integration are not altogether desirable as long as the standard of education and culture is lower than generally accepted. There have been feelings of antagonism and resentment. The Churches and other organisations have warned against hatred and discrimination — after all the Swiss themselves wanted the foreign labourer to do the manual work which they were no longer willing to do.

The restrictions on foreign labour have been received with concern and scepticism in many quarters. It is feared that production will be reduced for the time being as rationalising firms and increasing productivity cannot be effected from one day to the next. There is certainly room for improvement. Whole branches of industry with outdated structure have been able to survive thanks to foreign workers, instead of being forced out of business or at least made to rationalise. Unprofitable production could be stopped. The constant changing of jobs especially amongst the younger employees has an adverse effect on productivity and quality of work. A reduction in the change of jobs from the present 30% of the employees to 10% would enable a saving of up to 100,000 workers.

It is natural that the suggestion to work longer hours has been met with disapproval. The "Trumpf Buur" suggests that with two hours a week more work, another 100,000 foreign workers could be dispensed with. Such proposals are unpopular. The trade union federation rejected them as unacceptable demands. Yet, working more does not only mean being at work for longer hours, but to do better work in an improved "working climate" and a more sensible attitude to the "dirty jobs." The Zurich Chamber of Commerce considers restrictive measures as of problematic value as long as the Swiss people are not ready to take up the less interesting jobs.

The Swiss Bank personnel federation (140,000 members), decided to make a first contribution towards curbing the excessive boom by renouncing any reduction in working hours. When the firm of Rieter in Winterthur asked their staff whether they were willing to work longer hours, 83% were willing to do so. But the trade unions protested violently. They will have to be reasonable.

The whole problem is a complex one. As Dr. ing. Arnold Roth (Aarau) said in an article in the "Neue Zurcher Zeitung" on 11th March, if a ceiling of the total number of workers were to be adhered to for any length of time, the effect on the individual firm would be deathly. It would be the best way to destroy the dynamic character of the proud Swiss industry and to turn it into a museum. He is by no means alone in challenging his compatriots to courageous action. It is essential that the development of the economy will be led back to initiative and freedom of action for

the large and small undertaken as well as for the artisan. The very essence of economy is change, expansion and contraction, and these cannot be prevented by force for any length of time. (News contained in this article apart from sources already mentioned, was received by courtesy of Agence Telegraphique Suisse)

News of the Colony

Auckland Swiss Club

On September 18th, the Auckland Swiss Club held a masquerade ball. Clowns, Arabs, Cleopatra, Red Indians, Vikings, Maori Tikis, Toadstools and even our own rioting prisoners were just a few of the characters who met in the dimly lit Edendale Hall underneath huge lamps, coloured streamers and a bamboo canopy.

We all appreciated the good supper, especially the Fastuacht-schuechli.

Obviously everyone there had a good time but it does seem a pity that those who spent many days in preparing the hall and decorations were not encouraged by a better attendance.

—M.H.

NEWS FROM TARANAKI

Here we are back again, after our recent trip around the world and to tell you some of the things that we saw, especially in our 3½ months stay in Switzerland.

Switzerland we found to be one of the cleanest countries in the world, and the people are very proud of it, and aim to keep it so, nowhere did we see, paper or bottles or rubbish lying about, the countryside and farms are so neat, it is no wonder visitors call it a fairy land.

Flying in from Rome we had a most wonderful view of the Matterhorn and the mountains. They were a sight to see. While flying into Switzerland on a Swiss plane we were served, Most, Swiss cheese and sandwiches.

The people in Switzerland are very busy, and take a pride in their work. Even after employing thousands of Italians and Spanish and Turks, there are still many jobs left undone. Nearly all the big factories are expanding. "Landis & Gear," in Zug, are building another big addition to their huge building. In fact, every where you go you see buildings going up.

Switzerland, as I knew it, in my younger days, is no more. Even in my home town, Mettmenstetten, it is two or three times as big.

We went up most of the big mountains like Youngfrau, Santis, Bernina and to Zermatt, and I must say the Swiss railways are an engineering feat that must be seen. The tunnels and bridges are a wonder, a wonder that man can do such things.